



THE
RIVERFRONT
CHILDREN'S
CENTER

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Testimony regarding SB 111 An Act Concerning Child Care Programs

Submitted By:
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Good morning, Sen. Oster, Rep. Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB 111. My name is Susan Radway, and I am the Executive Director of Riverfront Children's Center in Groton, and a resident of Waterford.

The childcare industry is in crisis. The current staffing shortage has resulted in closed classrooms and wait lists are increasing. This staffing shortage has exacerbated the challenge families have faced for years, access to affordable high-quality care and early education. When centers must close classrooms due to lack of staff, income is lost, which eventually leads to programs shutting their doors.

Connecticut needs a system that is accessible to all families in need; a system that addresses the inequities related to access and quality; 85% of Riverfront families receive tuition assistance. They can not afford to pay an increased tuition rate to assure their child has access to high-quality care and education. *62% of Riverfront's funding comes from state-funded programs (Groton School Readiness, New London School Readiness, Child Day Care). With no meaningful increase in funding since 2015, and a 41% increase in minimum wage, we struggle to raise the additional funding needed to maintain the quality program we are know for. To address the salary compression that has taken place with the minimum wage increase the center's salary line item (by 2023) will have increased by \$300,000 and doubled the amount we must raise through grants, donations and fundraising. We do not have a magic wand or a fairy godmother; we cannot pull money out of a hat! We need help! We need more than thank you for being an essential worker. We need funds to pay our teachers a fair wage and good benefits.*

The current funding levels have impacted Riverfront's ability to provide competitive wages to our teachers. As a result, we have lost teachers to other fields and been unable to fill vacancies. We have kept all classrooms open, but with fewer children enrolled so that we can provide teacher breaks while operating the center eleven hours a day.

The childcare system needs on-going, substantial wage supplements and benefits for small private centers, nonprofit centers, and family childcare providers. Childcare programs throughout the state are struggling to provide quality services with inadequate funding. **It is time to recognize the childcare industry for what it is, essential to families and Connecticut's economy.** Please put funding in the budget to support Connecticut's childcare industry.

